



Daily Verse and Comment

Genesis 28:16-18

(16) And Jacob awoke from his sleep, and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." (17) And he was afraid and said, "How fearful *is* this place! This *is* nothing but the house of God, and this *is* the gate of Heaven!" (18) So Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone which he had put at his head, and set it *as* a memorial pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.

A Faithful Version

The Hebrew word translated as "oil," *shemen* (*Strong's* #8081), literally means "fat" or "grease," but figuratively, it means "richness," an important idea to keep in mind. The word is also translated as "fruitful." Hence, oil symbolizes wealth, abundance, health, energy, and a vital ingredient for a good life.

Anciently, oil's primary use was for food. Olive oil, a high-quality fat, gives the body more energy than carbohydrates do, and at the same time, it has fewer byproducts when metabolized. The people of the Mediterranean have known for millennia that natural fats are good for us, and the fat in olive oil is especially beneficial. While we might think of oil as just some cooking grease, the people of the Middle East held a far different view.

As we know from the [Parable of the Ten Virgins](#) ([Matthew 25:1-13](#)), citizens of the ancient Mediterranean world also filled their lamps with oil. It not only burns as fuel in the body, but also as fuel for fire. It was also used as medicine, as the Parable of the Good Samaritan reveals. In the dry, desert regions, olive oil protected and nourished the skin and scalp. One early writer, Pliny, says it could even be used to protect the body against the cold at night. As we learn from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, [God](#) commanded oil to be used in the consecration of sacred people and things, in addition to its use as an ingredient in some of the offerings.

For the people of the time, then, olive oil was almost like liquid gold. In fact, oil sometimes functioned as a kind of currency. When properly made and stored, it will keep for years and thus hold its value. Biblically, abundant oil is a sign of prosperity ([Deuteronomy 32:13](#); [33:24](#); [II Kings 18:32](#); [Job 29:6](#); [Joel 2:19](#), 24), and running out of oil is indicative of famine and hard times ([Joel 1:10](#); [Haggai 1:11](#)). In the Proverbs, excessive use of oil signifies wastefulness ([Proverbs 21:17](#)), while saving oil is characteristic of a wise man ([Proverbs 21:20](#)). While we no longer attach such value to oil, we need to understand its importance to life for those in the Bible.

When we consider all the uses of oil and the value it adds to life, we can understand why it symbolizes richness, fruitfulness, abundance, and vitality. We can also grasp why it played such an integral part in the consecration of things like Jacob's pillar, representing the richness, fruitfulness, and abundance of God being poured out. While the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will certainly produce abundance and fruitfulness (see [Galatians 5:22-23](#)), it is more accurate to say that oil and the Holy Spirit are *often parallel*, but not exclusively so. As the example of Israel shows, God frequently provides abundance without imparting His Spirit.

When God revealed Himself to Jacob at Bethel in the dream, Jacob was a lying, cheating, supplanting scoundrel fleeing for his life. After his dream and God's words to him, however, he was a man with a future. A tremendous change had taken place in his life, even though God had not yet given him His Spirit. God made promises concerning his descendants and his safety. He promised not to leave him, which is abundance indeed!

A transformation begins to occur in Jacob as a result of God initiating a relationship with him. Jacob begins to taste true abundance through this experience with God, the source of everything oil represents. In one sense, His visitation of Jacob was similar to the man pouring fine, expensive oil on a dumb rock: It set something apart with abundance that was ordinarily common and unremarkable.

Going back to the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the Holy Spirit is certainly an aspect of what the five wise virgins possessed, but now we can see that there is more to the symbol. The ones who were wise had a reserve of God's

spiritual richness, fruitfulness, and abundance, which would *include* the Holy Spirit but not be limited to it. They had these things because they had an active, growing relationship with Him. The foolish virgins had a measure of those things, but they were foolish because they did not have enough. They did not take the time to prepare and ensure that they had everything they needed to last through the times of darkness.

— David C. Grabbe

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